ORIGIN OF "GREEN THUMB"

Although the term seems to be in general use, information is scanty as to its origin. Maurice Mullay, of Columbus, Ohio, has come up with the most lucid explanation to date. He says, "Currently the term, 'Green Fingers' is in wider usage in England and one tart English expatriate described 'Green Thumb' as an American vulgarization. Probably the soundest hypothesis for the term's origin is given by the manager of a Boston Horticultural House, who says that his Scottish gardener father used to tell him that a green thumb, stained from the algae on the greenhouse flower pots was the trademark of a gardener. This is consistent with the oldest and by far the most charming of all legends about the origin of 'Green Thumb'."

The story goes:

In the olden days there once lived in Italy a monk named Fra Antonio. One of his important duties was the care of the cloister garden. So successful was he in the growing of herbs, fruit trees, flowers, and other plants that he became the wonder, and almost envy, of all of his brothers. When asked the secret of his success as a gardener, he always shrugged his shoulders and replied, "I'm sure I do not know, except that I love the plants."

One day he was working in his garden when two of the monks approached from behind his back. When he finally turned and saw them, the senior monk smiled and said, "I know why Fra Antonio can make plants grow so well. See, he has a green thumb."

Fra Antonio looked down at his hands and sure enough, his right thumb was green from the plants that he had been handling. From that day to this, all good gardeners have been said to have a "green thumb."

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